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ABSTRACT

Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois were two African American scholars of the later 1800s and early 1900s who captured the imagination of both blacks and whites at various levels of society. They disagreed on how blacks should be educated and what they should be taught. Du Bois wanted blacks to become intellectuals, equal to white scholars, while Washington insisted on basic skills and vocational education. A study of the childhood of each man reveals the etiology of their personal and professional philosophies and illustrates how the study of an important figure can be content for multicultural education. The ideas of James Banks relative to personal knowledge and cultural knowledge are illustrated in the early lives of Du Bois and Washington. Washington, born into slavery in 1856, became the most well-known black educator of his time. Although he founded Tuskegee University, he stressed the importance of basic education and vocational skills for all blacks. The roots of this philosophy may be found in his childhood of poverty and limited access to basic education. Du Bois, born in 1868, was the only black student in his high school graduating class. His opportunities for schooling were consistent and free, and formed the basis for his emphasis on higher academic education and the importance of scholarship. The philosophies of these men were formed by their experiences, as educational theories have often stressed. A study of their early lives illustrates the importance of experience in the formation of the individual and provides material that can be used in multicultural education of children. (Contains 15 references.) (SLD)

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HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON BIOGRAPHIES FOR CHILDREN AS CONTENT FOR MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

Introduction

Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois were two African American Scholars of the late 1800s and early 1900s who captured the imagination of both blacks and whites at various levels of society. Du Bois, was the first black to graduate from Harvard, the founder of the NAACP and superb scholar. Booker T. Washington was a graduate of a post-Civil War industrial education school, and founded what today is Tuskegee University in Alabama.

They disagreed vehemently over *how* blacks should be educated and *what* they should be taught. Du Bois wanted blacks to become intellectuals equal to white scholars, Washington insisted that this was not practical because blacks, for the most part had not had access to even rudimentary education, therefore, they needed basic skills and vocational education. A study of their childhood reveals several essential elements that formed the etiology of their personal and professional philosophies.

Theoretical framework

Professional knowledge that is brought to the classroom by teachers has been influenced by *their* experiences as students in university based teacher education programs. Professors in university settings, who served as their teachers, were in turn, also influenced by thinkers and scholars who came before them. Philosophical beliefs, more often than not, form the values that direct classroom practice, research interests, and ultimate discoveries by scholars who are active in various fields of study. The work of scholars and thinkers in various fields of study are represented in the university based curriculum, and those active in promoting it. Information derived from this process will ultimately influence the relationship between teachers who take courses in these programs, and children in classrooms where they teach.

Within the aforementioned context, *Experience* can be viewed as an important focus for the study of multicultural issues. From the perspective of our own *experience,* the understanding of other cultures can emerge from the underlying factors of personalized experiences from childhood through adulthood. In human *experiences* there are investments of *self* with various intensities.

From the philosophical perspective of *phenomenology,* experience has two dimensions. *Objects of consciousness* is one dimension of human experience, and it prevails at the level of our ordinary awareness. *Acts of consciousness* is the other dimension, and it involves perceptions, values, and the unconscious processing of information. These two dimensions are related in significant ways, and this relationship is labeled *intentionality* by phenomenologists. In *Landscapes of Learning,* Maxine Greene captures the pragmatic nature of this theme.

> .....consciousness is always *of* something; it is characterized by intentionality. To say that I am conscious of someone approaching me is to say that I am perceiving a figure down the street as a man coming closer and closer to my space. As he comes nearer to me, I may intuit a threatening quality in his stance..... or I may suddenly remember that he was once a coworker of mine. Who he turns out to be, for me, depends upon the way I finally become conscious of him. At best I can only come in touch with certain aspects of the man, because my understanding of him depends upon my vantage point and previous experiences. I know that there are sides to him that are hidden from me; there are profiles of his personality, of his character, that are out of my reach.
> .....Consciousness as perspective grasping is our way of encountering the natural and human world. (pp 14-15)

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Phenomenology is a philosophy that has been a subject of scholarly pursuit in various fields of study like education, psychology, psychiatry, social work, theology, anthropology, and other social sciences. Phenomenology focuses primarily on individual experiences as a basis for analysis. It is theorized that as individuals process new information derived from our experiences; and the act of experiencing is influenced by knowledge acquired from previous experiences. The knowledge that is retained from various experiences–formal and informal–can be limited by our life circumstances and what we bring to the experience. Therefore, individuals are involved in a natural process of attempting to expand upon the consciousness awareness that results from experiences. This effort is limited by previous experiences that have influenced our ideas, beliefs, and wishes; and limits to a degree, how we think about certain phenomena.

Phenomenologists theorize that individuals attempt to deal with these limitations through creative imagination. These acts of imagining enable individuals to expand upon the meanings derived from an experience by increasing the possibility for variations through thought. This method of expansion is called *fantasy variations.* It is not possible to remove limiting factors completely, and what remains from the experience and *fantasy variations* is called the *essence.* Fundamental to phenomenological thought is the belief that individual interpretations of experiences cannot be invalidated by the emergence of a proposed *objective truth.* Philosophers and other scholars with major interests in phenomenology have established common interests with *existential* philosophers and scholars.

Founded by German philosophers Kant and Hagel, *existentialism* rejected the prevailing scholarly thought that dominated European philosophy during the 1800s. European philosophers of great influence during that time, defined philosophy as an objective science with the capacity to report universal truths. Kant, Hagel, and their followers, insisted that the scientific methods prevailing at that time were inappropriate for the study of philosophical issues. Objective methods seeking certainties, they argued, would obscure a study of experiences as the basic principles of individual existence.

G. W. F. Hagel (1770-1831) remains as one of the most influential German philosophers of his time. It was his philosophy that was related to his *dialectic* for which he is most remembered. Here, he theorized three phases of dialectic emergence; *thesis, antithesis,* and *synthesis.* Even though the area of Hagel's dialectic development gained great attention, as well as his interpretations of social, political, and historical issues, It is his ideas related to the inner self that are significant for existentialist phenomenologists. In this regard, he extended dialectic thought to all areas of the human experience. Hagel argued that we all strive for an inner tranquility. When individuals attempt to achieve inner *harmony and tranquility* through external wealth, influence, and power—whatever conflict might emerge, is usually resolved in favor of *inner states.* Such conflicts can be avoided, Hagel theorized, if one's external activity emerged from an inner state that is tranquil and harmonious.

Theories of Multicultural issues

James Banks, a major voice in multicultural education has defined the value of knowledge as fundamental to the study multiculturalism. He articulates five types and knowledge and contends that each type should be a part of academic discourse. Banks' typologies of *personal* knowledge and *cultural* knowledge are pertinent to the content in this paper.

All knowledge reflects the values and interests of its creators, and illustrates how the debate between the multiculturalists and the Western traditionalists is rooted in their conflicting conceptualizations about the nature of knowledge (Banks,p. 4,1993).

Anthropologist John Ogbu, defines multicultural content as emerging from the personal group histories of various racial and ethnic groups in relation to how they came to the United States. Some groups came as a result of their wish to improve their condition. African Americans, unlike most others, were brought here against their will as slaves. He labels these different groups as voluntary and involuntary minorities.

The primary cultural differences of voluntary minorities and the secondary differences of involuntary minorities affect minority school learning differently. ...involuntary minorities experience more difficulties in school learning and performance partly because of the relationship between their cultures and the mainstream culture (Ogbu, p. 9, 1993).

A Partial Selection of Content

Booker Taliaferro Washington (1856-1915), born into slavery in Hale's Ford, Virginia, became the most well known Black educator of his time. By his followers—he would be described as a moderate—the rest of the nation would consider him an extreme conservative. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois was born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. By his followers he would be considered a liberal—the rest of the nation would think of Du Bois as a radical.

Washington was more well known because he was older, and he had a reputation for helping to establish an internationally known institution—known today as Tuskegee University in Alabama. Washington served as principal and later president of Tuskegee for 34 years. During his time at Tuskegee he pioneered out-reach programs in the rural South. He also developed programs to teach the isolated and unskilled rural Blacks how to get more out of their crops, the importance of sanitation, hygiene, and financial matters. He stressed that schools for African Americans should concentrate on vocational education and the skilled trades in demand at that time.

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868-1963), was born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. The family of Du Bois's mother could be traced to the Revolutionary War, and they had farmed in this community of a few Blacks since that time. His father was the son of a seaman from Haiti whose parents were Black and White. They moved to Connecticut early in Du Bois's life, and his father, who had become a barber, deserted the family. He went to live with his grandfather on the farm in Massachusetts, and by the time he was seven years old his mother moved back to the farm. By 1875 many northern communities had organized some type of educational system for their youth. His opportunities for schooling were consistent and free.

Du Bois was the only Black student in his high school graduating class, and he graduated with the highest grades in the group. In that particular high school it was expected that students with the highest academic records would attend a prestigious New England institution. Instead, this young scholar was sent off to a Black institution in Nashville, Tennessee—Fisk University. When Du Bois entered Fisk, the school had been in operation for a mere 20 years.

Booker T. Washington was born a slave on a plantation in Franklin County, Virginia, near a small postal-delivery crossroads named Hale's Ford. He reported in his autobiography:

> My life had its beginning in the midst of the most miserable, desolate, and discouraging surroundings. . . . I have not been successful in securing any information that would throw an accurate light upon the history of my family beyond my mother. She, I remember, had a half brother and a half sister. . . . Her addition to the slave family attracted about as much attention as the purchase of a new horse or cow. Of my father I know even less of than my mother. I do not even know his name. I have heard reports to the effect that he was a white man who lived on one of the near-by plantations. (Washington,1989, pp. 1, 2)

Washington's mother was a plantation cook, and her one-room cabin served as living quarters for her, Booker and two other children. Their bed consisted of a bundle of rags called a *pallet,* that rested on a dirt floor.

During one of his speeches as president of Tuskegee, he was asked about his youth. He gave a thoughtful reply to this question in his autobiography.

> Until that question was asked it had never occurred to me that there was no period of my life that was devoted to play. From the time that I can remember anything, almost every day of my life has been occupied in some kind of labor; though I think I would now be a more useful man if I had had time for sports. . . . I had no schooling whatever while I was a slave though I remember on several occasions I went as far as the schoolhouse door with one of my young mistresses to carry her books. The picture of several dozen boys and girls in a schoolroom engaged in studying this way would be about the same as getting into paradise. (Washington, 1895 pp. 6, 7)

Washington's descriptions of his childhood bear poignant witness to the type of upbringing that was common plantation life for Black children of that period.

> On plantation life in Virginia, and even later, meals were gotten by the children very much as dumb animals got theirs. It was a piece of bread here and a scrap of meat there. It was a cup of milk at one time and some potatoes at another.

(Washington, 1985 p. 9)

There is a noticeable absence of bitterness toward Whites in Washington's autobiography. He actually comes close to supporting the period as having positive influences on Black life, especially for artisans. He often stated that well-respected, talented, craftsmen and craftswomen of his generation probably learned their craft on a plantation. During the Civil War his mother married a slave from a nearby plantation, and their owners cooperated in allowing them occasional visits. Washington Ferguson and Booker's mother—Jane Burroughs—had a daughter and named her Amanda. Unknown to Booker at the time, Jane Ferguson gave Booker his White father's surname, Taliaferro. During the Civil War Ferguson left the plantation for a job in the West Virginia salt mines in Malden. It took the Union Army about two years to enforce the proclamation in Malden as well as in most communities, so it was not until late in 1865 that the Ferguson family was free to travel to Malden to join their father and stepfather. Booker and his brother, John, in a very short time secured jobs at the mine packing barrels. Sometime later their family took in a homeless boy named James. The salt mines attracted many Blacks to the area for jobs that for most of them, actually paid salaries. Booker was determined to attend school and did not see that as a possibility as long as he worked in the mines. He was further inspired when he overheard some fellow workers in the mine discuss a school for Blacks where you were allowed to work off your tuition costs.

As a child his desire for education was so strong that he was on constant alert about any information regarding opportunities to be taught. He reported in his autobiography that "from the time I can remember having thoughts about anything, I recall that I had an intense longing to read." Soon after the family was able to live together in West Virginia, Booker pleaded with his mother to get him a book. He relates that his mother's perseverance enabled her to get a used copy of Webster's spelling book at a time when no Black person in his village could read. With his mother's encouragement he taught himself the alphabet phonetically. "In all my efforts to learn to read my mother shared fully my ambition, and sympathized with me and aided me in every way she could . . . though she was totally ignorant, so far as book knowledge was concerned, she had high ambitions for her children."

During Booker's teen years there came to his village a young Black man who had learned to read in Ohio. Black residents of the village found out he could read and arranged for him to read the newspaper to them at the end of the day. This became a major event in the Black neighborhood. Booker related later, "How I used to envy this man! He seemed to me to be the one young man in all the world who ought to be satisfied with his attainments." The coming of this teen inspired the community to engage in a quest for their own school. The community learned that another young man from Ohio with considerable education had recently arrived. Each family who wanted to learn contributed toward a salary for him so that he would spend a day with each family.

Children waited in great anticipation for "teacher's day" in their modest homes. The young teacher was finally able to make arrangements to attend day school during the early morning hours and part of the day if he could work in the mines for at least five hours a day. It was common in those days for schools to accommodate work schedules for chores around the farms and local factories. Word passed quickly throughout the Black communities in 1891 that a school was being built in Kanawha Valley.

By the time the new school was chartered, Booker had already made plans to attend. However, work in the salt mines had increased his family's income, and his father refused to let him attend the new school for Blacks. Booker later described this experience as "one of the keenest disappointments that I have ever experienced." Booker and his mother were able to work out a compromise with his father to pay a teacher to provide lessons at night. "These night lessons were so welcome that I think I learned more at night than the other children did during the day."

The small school Washington attended during his early years was expanded along with the increase in Black residents. Approximately 20 years after he entered Hampton Institute in Virginia, in 1891, the West Virginia Collegiate Institute, financed by the state, was opened for Black students in the county.

In addition to providing educational services for African American citizens, the building of schools was used to advance the interests of politicians in much the same way as putting in a new road or securing a post office site for a rural community served political ends. It was also commonly acknowledged among industrialists and state legislators that northern industries would be reluctant to locate in an area where the labor population could not read or write.

Conclusion

The differences and similarities in the lives of Washington and Du Bois came form their contributions to the betterment of lives for African Americans through the employment of different *philosophies* that were influenced by their unique and different *experiences.* It is also true, that the study of their lives can serve as a foundation for the study of multicultural issues in education.

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